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Crunch Time

Your business may be on a budget, but you can still pump up your visibility. These 8 proven tactics will get you noticed on the cheap.

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Do you have ambitious growth plans for your company, but a limited marketing budget? There's no need to compromise your goals. There are lots of great, budget-smart tactics that will put your business on the fast track--even if you don't have deep pockets. Here's a list of eight proven marketing tools and tactics specially created for the budget-conscious entrepreneur.

1. Customer rewards: Since it may cost as much as five times more to win a new customer than to retain an old one, customer reward programs are a lower-cost alternative to acquisition marketing. Create and actively promote a loyalty program that rewards on enrollment and then provides graduated incentives to your best customers. To keep customers coming back, provide in-kind rewards rather than gifts from other vendors.

2. Opt-in e-mail: E-mail is a low-cost, high-return way to enhance customer relationships and increase sales. E-mail campaigns can be conducted for a fraction of the cost of other tactics and can be executed in weeks, not months. The key is to e-mail as often as twice monthly, but only to an in-house list of members who have agreed to receive e-mail from you. Keep the content extremely relevant, and you'll see response rates climb.

3. Local paid search: The vast majority of American shoppers do research online before making a purchase. They already know what they want to buy--they're just looking for the right place to buy it. Google and Yahoo!, among others, offer services for local advertisers, and Yahoo!'s Local Sponsored Search program provides a locator page that will drive traffic to your store even if you don't have your own website. Visit <http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com> and click on "Market Your Business Online" to find out more.

4. Marriage mail: Trying to reach consumer households in specific market areas? Your own direct-mail campaign could cost a small fortune. Instead, use "marriage mail"--send your ad or coupon in a joint mailing with other advertisers. A leading provider is Valpak, which designs, prints and mails more than 20 billion ads each year, providing an affordable alternative to stand-alone direct mail.

5. Media relations: Do-it-yourself PR is a lower-cost alternative to advertising, but it requires know-how and time. For best results, tailor your stories to the needs of the individual media outlets on your list. Then send a release or pitch letter, and follow up by phone. These initial contacts should lay the groundwork for ongoing relationships with key members of the press.

6. Grass-roots advocacy: Word-of-mouth is often the most desirable form of marketing. To get people talking, run a contest, stage an event, or assemble a group of "influencers." The creator of a series of books and products for preteen girls, for example, has used its website to enroll several hundred girls to act as advisors on everything from book characters to plots. The members are also the first to receive information on new products. You can bet these

influencers share their inside news with friends.

7. Marketing partnerships: When money is tight, it often pays to partner with another company that targets the same audience. You can forge marketing partnerships with businesses that offer complementary services and pool your prospect lists or share advertising costs. A kitchen appliance retailer could partner with a remodeling contractor to market full-service kitchen upgrades, for example, or neighboring technology companies might jointly promote their region as a tech corridor.

8. Cinema advertising: Over 27,000 movie screens run advertisements. [Screenvision Direct](#) works with local advertisers to produce advertising slides that run during the pre-show entertainment. And with rates as low as \$25 per week per screen, you'll pay just \$1,000 a month to reach nearly everyone who sees any movie at your neighborhood 10-screen multiplex.

Contact marketing expert Kim T. Gordon, author of Maximum Marketing, Minimum Dollars: The Top 50 Ways to Grow Your Small Business, at www.smallbusinessnow.com. Her new e-book, Big Marketing Ideas for Small Budgets, is available exclusively from Entrepreneur at www.smallbizbooks.com.

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